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WASHINGTON, D. C.

THE MARKET BASKET

by

Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture

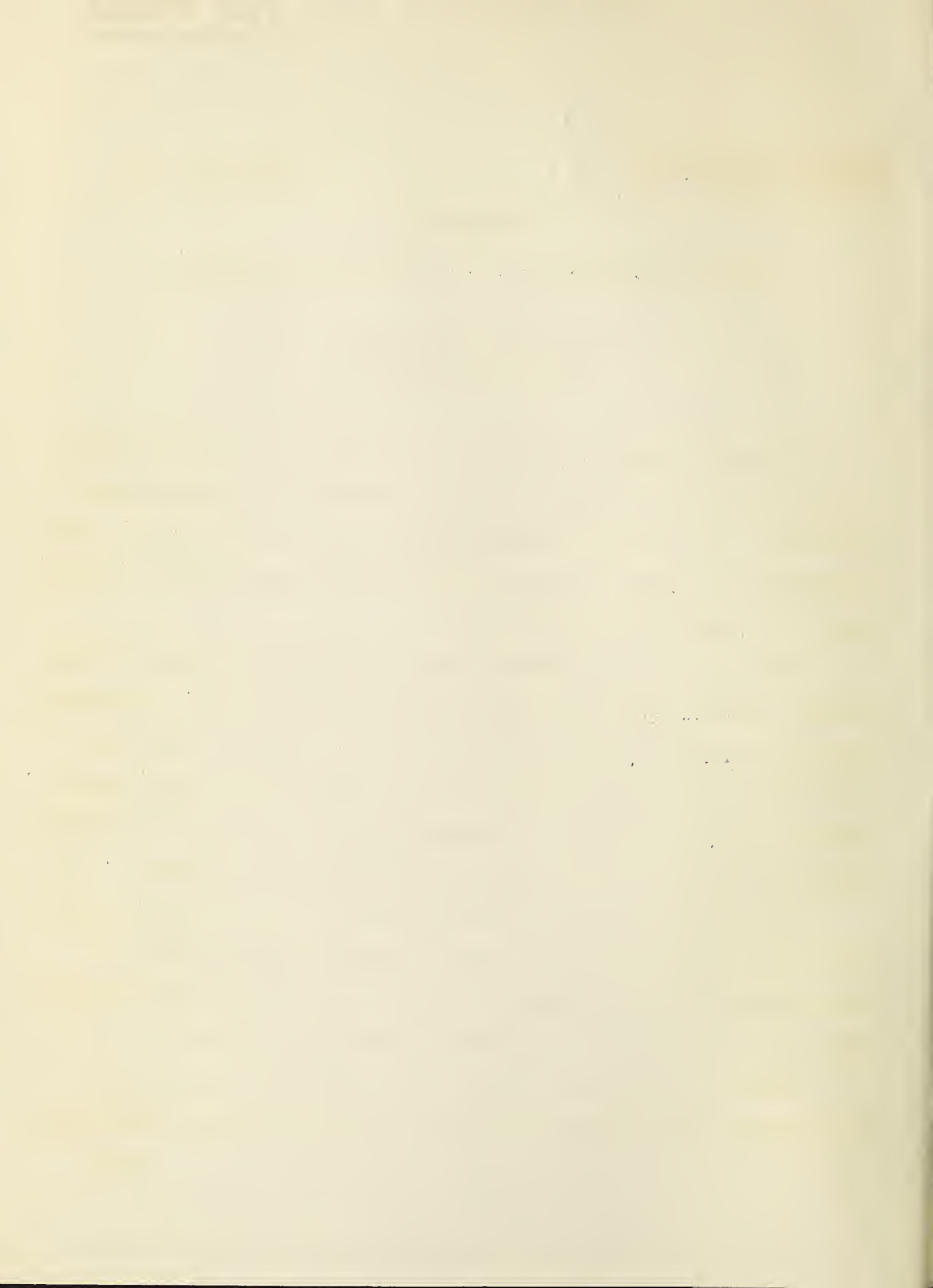
FRUIT CAKES NEED TO RIPEN BEFORE THE HOLIDAYS

For a merry Christmas, kitchen festivities must begin early in December, and making fruit cakes is one of the first in the traditional round of holiday preparations. This particular holiday food must be started early, since no self-respecting fruit cake wants to be served unless it has had some time to ripen and bring out its characteristic spicy flavor.

Cakes that are rich with fruit and nuts need several weeks for all their different flavors to mix and blend with each other. These elaborate cakes may be either light or dark. They are the ones to be cut into paper-thin slices and served with tea or coffee to friends who drop in throughout the holiday season. They are also the ones that will be wrapped in bright-colored paper and tied with perky bows to be used as heart-warming gifts for friends and neighbors.

On the other hand, there are the everyday fruit cakes which cost less and can be served in larger pieces for dessert at family meals because they are simpler mixtures with more cake and less fruit. Yet, even these cakes need to be made a few days ahead of time and stored to develop extra goodness.

Between the very rich and the very simple fruit cake are all sorts of variations made with different combinations and different amounts of fruit, nuts,



and spices. For all of the different variations of fruit cake there are two main cautions that spell the difference between success and failure. First of all, the fruit and nuts require careful preparation; and secondly, the baking or steaming of the cake must be exactly right.

For best results, the fruit and nuts are prepared and all the ingredients are measured before the cake is actually started. Mechanical "fingers" have now taken over more and more of the drudgery of getting the fruit and nuts ready. Today nuts may be purchased already shelled and chopped, although the cook must inspect them carefully to see that they are free from bits of shell. Dried fruits such as raisins and apricots, which are abundant this year, come in convenient packages and are almost ready to use. The candied fruit may be purchased in large chunks or in packages of measured amounts already cut into small-sized pieces.

Some women prefer to do much of the preparation process for themselves. In this case it is well to get the fruit and nuts ready ahead of time and store them in covered containers in a cool place, so they are ready to mix into the batter and bake at a later date.

The good cook is careful to see that everything that goes into the cake is of good quality. She also makes sure that the fruit is cut quite fine so that the cake will be easy to slice and so each small piece will have a variety of things in it. In mixing the cake, she adds part of the flour to the fruit and nuts to separate the pieces and keep them well distributed throughout the cake.

If the cake is baked in an oblong loaf, the pan should be quite narrow in order to get the cake done in the center without burning the edges. A round pan with a tube in the center is also very satisfactory, since it allows the heat to penetrate evenly. Such a round cake is served more attractively when cut into thin slices instead of thick wedges, like pieces of pie.



Practical containers of glass or earthenware are also on the market now in small sizes and a variety of shapes. These "pans" have the advantage of needing no wax paper lining before they are filled with the fruit cake batter. The baking dish, as well as the cake, will be appreciated as a gift.

After the batter is poured into the pan, the top is decorated with cherries, candied pineapple, angelica, candied orange peel, pecans, or blanched almonds. These may be arranged to form the petals, stem, and leaves of a flower; or they may ^{be} even/made to simulate a green wreath with holly berries.

Whether to bake or to steam the fruit cake is a question that can be answered only by individual preference. Baking is probably the commoner method and makes for a slightly drier cake. Common sense in the baking is just as important as using a good recipe, and most cooks agree that a slow oven of 250 to 300 degrees F. is advisable for a cake that is heavy with fruit. Too hot an oven will cause a hard crust to form on the edges of the cake before the center is sufficiently baked, and the fruit may burn and spoil the taste.

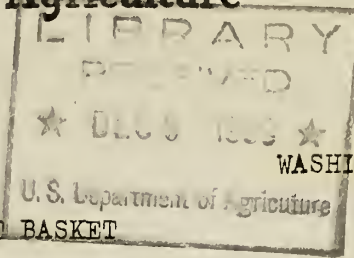
Steaming a fruit cake gives it a somewhat moist texture that many people prefer and it does away with the danger of burning the crust. Either a regular steamer or a pressure cooker, with the petcock open, may be used. Also, a steamer can be improvised by using a tightly covered container with a rack to keep the cake pan well above the boiling water. Cover the cake loosely with another pan to prevent the steam from condensing on it. A four-pound cake is steamed for four to five hours and then placed in a very slow oven of 225 to 250 degrees F. to dry for about an hour.

After it comes from the oven, cool the cake on a rack, then wrap tightly in wax paper to prevent the moisture from evaporating, and finally store in a tightly covered tin container. If mold should develop the cake will still be good if the mold is scraped off, the surface of the cake wiped with alcohol, and fresh paper used for wrapping.

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WASHINGTON, D. C.

THE MARKET BASKET

by

Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture

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CRANBERRY CROP IS GOOD

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Indian medicine men deserve credit for introducing the cranberry as a food to the early settlers. But modern science deserves even more credit for improving the quality and increasing the harvest of this tart-tasting berry that comes to the market in abundance this year. In fact, the cranberry crop this winter is estimated to be larger than the average for the past ten years.

This cheery red berry, which brightens our dinner table, has a humble beginning in damp marshes or bogs. But these bogs are turned into thick carpets by the low, matted cranberry vines. And in the fall at harvest time the brilliant red berries can be seen spotting this flat surface. The berries grow successfully only in a few places since they need the acid soil of peat bogs and plenty of water for irrigation when they are threatened by frost or insects.

Not so long ago cranberries were sold only by the quart measure from a wooden barrel that the grocer kept in a place of honor during November and December. Now cranberries are available throughout the winter. They are stored under controlled conditions and the grocer buys only a small lot at a time. Often select berries come wrapped in one pound or half-pound packages. Some of the crop is canned, too, as ready-to-serve cranberry sauce, cranberry jelly, or cranberry juice. Then there are the frozen cranberries which may be used like the fresh ones to make colorful dishes throughout the year.

Several different varieties of the fresh berries are on the market today, but they all taste and look pretty much alike when cooked. However, some people prefer the small, deep garnet red berries because they give brighter color to a sauce and may be a bit less tart in taste. In other parts of the country the larger, light crimson berries are most popular. But the color and size of the berries makes little difference in determining quality. The best berries are firm, plump, and fresh-looking with a high luster. It pays for the homemaker to sort the cranberries carefully before cooking because even a few poor berries may give a bitter taste to the finished product. Discard berries that are shriveled, speckled, or soft even when the skin is firm.

Tradition has it that when the old-time seafaring men sailed out of New England harbors to Africa and around the Horn, they stocked the cook's galley with a barrel of cranberries. Sometimes as the sailors passed they grabbed a handful of the berries and ate them raw as they stood their watch.

Nobody had heard of vitamins. But the sailors found that the little red berry helped keep them fit, helped ward off scurvy, the disease dreaded by crews shipping for long voyages.

Now science has discovered that cranberries may add considerable vitamin C to the diet when they are served in generous portions. Science also explains that vitamin C tends to be destroyed by heat and by exposure to air, and the food value of cranberries varies according to the way they are prepared. Most of the vitamin C is available when the berries are used raw, as in freshly-made relish or molded salad; some is lost when they are made into sauce; and even more is destroyed when the sauce is strained or the juice made into jelly.

Cranberry relish is one of the most popular ways to serve the raw fruit. It can be made in almost no time by grinding together through the food chopper 1 pound (1 quart) of raw cranberries and one orange. Quarter the orange and remove

the seeds, but use both the pulp and the skin of the orange. Sweeten this relish to taste with about 1 cup of sugar or strained honey, stirred into the ground fruit, and add $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of salt to bring out the flavor. Put the relish in a covered jar in the refrigerator and it will keep for two or three weeks and be ready to serve with any kind of meat or poultry.

Cranberry sauce and jelly remain popular as side dishes for the main course, but these old favorites may be combined with cream cheese or peanut butter to make attractive sandwiches or canapes. When spread on slices of cold chicken, cranberry jelly adds zest to a hearty sandwich.

The sauce or jelly can be made easily, because the high pectin and high acid content of the berries enables them to jelly quickly. But this same acid tends to make cranberry jelly "weep" after it is cut and this oozing liquid looks unattractive on the plate. For this reason, many women prefer to make small batches of jelly at a time and to put it in small molds that hold just enough for a single meal.

The cranberry combines well with many common foods. Muffins and fritters are colorful and tasty when the red berries are added, and cranberries often find their way into the dessert course. Cranberry sauce, with the berries left whole, makes a delicious pie filling -- particularly when combined with enough raisins to give the desired sweetness. Pour hot water over the raisins and let them plump, then stir into the hot sauce. Use this cranberry-raisin sauce either hot or cold in a baked pastry shell, but serve immediately before the crust becomes soaked. Cranberry jelly makes a suitable filling for the old fashioned jelly roll, and cranberry sauce is quite appropriate when served on biscuits as shortcake.

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THE MARKET BASKET

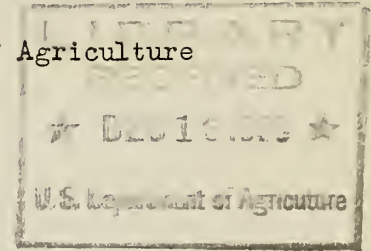
by

Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture

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GOOSE AND DUCK

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The holiday bird, roasted to a golden brown, is as much a part of the Christmas celebration as the holly-wreathed windows and the hearth fires crackling in pine-scented rooms.

It's a happy custom to say "Merry Christmas" with food. A big family dinner, planned around a roasted fowl, is a Christmas tradition everywhere. And according to family preference the bird may be turkey, goose, duck, or chicken. If your choice happens to be goose or duck, the Federal Bureau of Home Economics has these helpful suggestions for selecting and roasting.

Select a bird that will do justice to the distinguished role it is to play on the dinner table. Make certain it is plump and aristocratic-looking with a good covering of fat. But avoid a goose or duck that is excessively fat, because much of its weight will be lost in the grease that cooks out.

Only young birds are tender enough for roasting, so try to get a fowl that has seen only one summer. You can tell the age of geese and ducks by feeling the windpipe at the front of the neck. The windpipe on young birds is soft and pliable; on old ones it is hard and rigid. Old birds may also have a coarser skin that is more yellow in color and the breastbone will be harder.

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In buying the bird, be sure to find out the dressed weight. This weight is used in figuring the number of servings and in determining the temperature of the oven and the length of time for roasting. The dressed weight means the weight of the bird when picked but not drawn, and includes the head and feet.

An old proverb says, "The goose is a silly bird, too much for one, not enough for two." But geese on the market today are usually big enough to serve a family and guests. Figure about one and one-half pounds dressed weight for each serving.

For a smaller family, a duck may be a better choice. Most ducks come to the market weighing from five to six pounds, dressed, and will serve three or four people. Many of the young birds on the market now are called Long Island ducklings which identifies them as fast-grown ducks that are ready for the table when about twelve weeks old. The skin of the Long Island duckling is always white and the legs and beaks are yellow -- almost orange.

If the duck or goose is to make a good appearance at the table, it must be carefully drawn and prepared for the oven. Pull out the pin feathers and "down" and singe off the hairs quickly. Then cut off the head, feet, and oil sac on top of the tail.

To give the neck a trim finish, the bird should be carefully drawn. First make a cut in the skin at the back of the neck and carefully remove the crop. Then pull the skin down and cut the neck off short, saving the neck for making stock to be used in the giblet gravy. Finish drawing the bird from a lengthwise cut that is made under the tail. Wash the bird thoroughly, both inside and outside, with cold water and dry carefully.

Make the stuffing for the goose and duck with the three usual ingredients. Use a starchy base, add some fat for richness, and put in vegetable and herb seasoning. Either cultivated or wild rice is especially popular for stuffing both



of these birds, or the crumbs from bread that is two or three days old may be used as the starchy base.

Since the duck and goose are very fat, the wise cook will be cautious in adding much fat to the stuffing. Celery, parsley, and onion are used as seasoning vegetables. Among the herbs, savory, thyme, sweet marjoram, and sage are favorites. Other good additions to the duck or goose stuffing are dried apricots, prunes, raisins, and tart apple cubes candied with sugar.

Fill both the neck and body cavity with stuffing, but do not pack. Then draw the skin of the neck to the back and fasten it neatly with string or skewers. Sew up the opening under the tail. Then the string can be easily zipped out when the bird is taken from the oven. Tie the legs close to the body and fasten the wings with a string that crosses at the back where the marks will not show.

Start roasting the bird with the breast down on the rack of a shallow pan, without water and without a cover. Roast a five to six pound young duck at 350 degrees F. for two to two-and-one-half hours, or until the breast and thigh are tender when pierced with a skewer; roast a ten to twelve pound young goose at 325 degrees F. for three to four hours, or until tender.

You will find that a duck or goose is so fat that it needs no basting, but turn it every half hour to get all parts cooked evenly. If the bird is very fat, prick the skin during the roasting to allow the fat to drain out.

A simple trick in slicing the breast makes it easy to carve either a duck or goose successfully. First remove the leg and wing on the side nearest to you -- just as from any other bird. Then make deep cuts on the breast (about two inches apart) through the skin and flesh and down to the bone. Start the cuts at the ridge ^{in the middle} of the breast and go down the side at right angles to the ridge. Each of the sections of breast meat can then be lifted off and will have a layer of browned skin and rich fat on top. Repeat the carving process on the other side of the bird.

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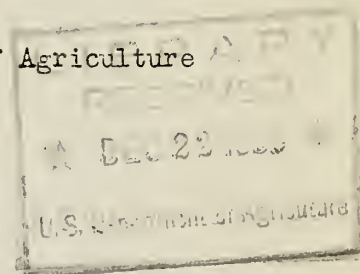
WASHINGTON, D. C.

THE MARKET BASKET

by

Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture

----- BUFFET MEALS FOR HOLIDAY ENTERTAINING -----



Santa has vanished up the chimney for another twelve months. And all too soon it will be time to carry out self-exacting New Year's resolutions.

But in the meantime, there's one of the most festive weeks of the year up for enjoyment. It's a week when everyone who can manage to be is home for the holidays — when usual routines give way to do-as-you-like schedules — when parties are planned at a moment's notice — and hostesses have no trouble getting together congenial guests.

In keeping with the air of gay informality that circulates at this season are company meals served buffet style. And as at any season, buffet service is an easy way to take care of more mealtime guests than the dining table can accommodate otherwise.

Although buffet meals are cut from a master pattern, this can be altered to suit different hostesses and different situations. The menu may be simple, or it may offer an elaborate selection. Guests may take their filled plates to quartett tables where there is a complete service laid at each plate. Or they may get silver and napkins from the buffet and sit where they choose.

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But while each hostess can work out details of service pretty much to her own satisfaction, there are certain limitations as to what kinds of food will be successful.

Every dish on the menu should be easy to serve and easy to eat. Foods to be served hot should be easy to keep hot. Have no moist foods that spoil the looks of a plate or require extra serving dishes. Avoid foods that need special silver.

Much of the charm of a buffet meal lies in the appearance of the food, attractively arranged against the background of snowy linen. Therefore, all the food should harmonize in color -- may even carry out a color theme.

With a little thought any hostess can find ways to make a particular meal go smoothly. One helpful trick is to butter the rolls before putting them on the table. Another is to pour coffee or other hot beverage after the guests are seated. Another, used by hostesses who serve "stand-up" buffets often, is to give each guest a small tray on which to assemble his meal. For ease of serving, have dishes in individual portions whenever possible.

There should be something hot at every wintertime buffet meal, in addition to the hot beverage. This will be the only dish that needs to have much last minute attention. One way to make sure that a hot dish is hot all the time is to have it come out of the oven in two installments, one for first servings, another for "seconds".

Appropriate hot dishes easy to serve are creamed turkey, chicken, or fish served on toast or in patty shells. Casserole dishes are good also. One might be chicken with mushrooms and almonds with egg sauce poured over it before it goes into the oven. Curried chicken with rice, and scalloped oysters are good supper dishes.

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Plebeian dishes that are favorites with the younger crowd are hearty macaroni and cheese, macaroni and tomato sauce with meat balls, and goulash. One of the most informal of all main dishes is a combination of piping hot frankfurters served with hot buns so that the guests can make their own sandwiches.

When the meat dish consists of cold cuts such as cold roast beef, pork, turkey, chicken, baked ham, cheese — the hot dish may be a vegetable. Scalloped potatoes and candied sweet potatoes are substantial ones that keep hot easily. Corn pudding, made with canned sweet corn, milk, and eggs is always popular. Scalloped apples are colorful and keep hot.

For a light meal, the beverage and bread may be the only two hot items on a menu. Spoon bread is easy to serve. For a buffet breakfast there's nothing better than waffles. But for these the hostess will need one or two helpers to make them fast enough for a crowd. Other possibilities at any meal are cranberry muffins, hot biscuits, small sandwiches of bread and butter and lettuce or other crisp greens, brown bread spread with cream cheese. Or, if time is limited, serve readymade rolls warmed in the oven and buttered in the kitchen.

To simplify the meal, offer a choice only of the foods that can be prepared ahead of time.

Suitable desserts are plain cake with hot chocolate sauce; gingerbread, baked in a shallow pan, cut into serving portions and garnished with whipped cream or orange marmalade; ice cold ambrosia (different kinds of fruit cut up together and perhaps with a sprinkling of coconut on top); individual cakes or pies. Some others are ice box cake; jelly roll, vanilla ice cream with a choice of sauces and toppings of chopped nuts or fruit for sundaes, arranged on the sideboard.

Following is a suggested menu for a holiday buffet supper. Have platters of cold sliced turkey and baked ham; two jellied fruit rings (1 might be red cranberry relish in gelatin — the other green lime gelatin with fresh grapefruit in it); tiny hot pimiento biscuits; parsley or butter sandwiches; relish dish with olives, radishes, carrot sticks, celery; pickled peaches.

And for dessert, bring in individual plum puddings each with a small lighted red candle in it.

